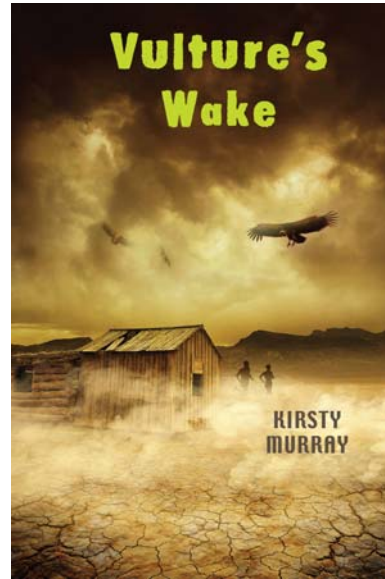


Holiday House Readers' Guide

Vulture's Wake

Kirsty Murray

Ages 15 up • 978-0-8234-2282-1



About the Book

Girls are extinct.
Chaos rules.
Welcome to the future.

Callum knows the bird flu wiped out females long ago. That's what he's been told all his life. But when he is kidnapped by Outstationers, Callum must depend on his intuition to stay alive. That means trusting Bo, his rescuer. Yet Bo is claiming to be something incredible: female.

Together, they cross a dangerous continent, seeking haven in the city of Vulture's Gate. But nothing can prepare them for what they encounter there. To survive, Callum must question everything he's been taught, and Bo must discover what it means to be female in a world at war.

From *Vulture's Wake*

"Callum felt the rumble of roadtrains and froze. Black shadows skittered across the blinds as a convoy pulled up outside. Outstationers. If only he hadn't insisted on staying home alone. Instinctively, he dove for the floor.

"The red neon sign at the gates of the compound flashed a warning across the surrounding desert, but Callum knew his fathers were still miles away.

"Inside, the Elvis Presley cuckoo man jumped out of his clock and crooned the hour. Fighting down his fear, Callum crawled across the black-and-white tiled floor toward the kitchen, heading for the safety of the security apartment. Beneath him, the ground trembled. Above, the ceiling buckled and Callum covered his ears to block out the sound of Molotov cocktails exploding against the compound roof. One by one, every alarm in the Refuge was triggered, screeching against the invasion. . . .

"Someone grabbed his ankle and dragged him outside, through the smoldering debris. The last thing Callum saw before he blacked out was the Elvis cuckoo clock falling into the rubble of Ruff & Rusty's Roadside Refuge."

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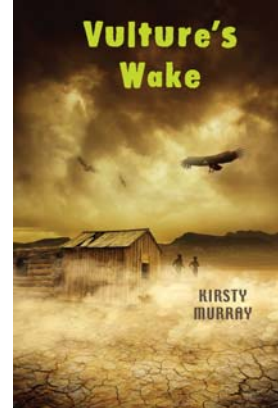
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Vulture's Wake

Questions for Discussion



1. How did the world get to be the way it is portrayed in *Vulture's Wake*? What events led to this?
2. Are you able to pinpoint when and where the book is set when you first meet Bo and Callum? What clues are you given about the era and setting?
3. Most of the names used in *Vulture's Wake* are symbolic to the story and characters. Can you explain the significance of at least five characters' names? What is the historical meaning of Bo's name? Can you discover the relevance of the names Bouboulina, Vulture's Gate, and Mater Misericordiae?
4. Why are stories so important to Bo? Can you discover the significance of the roboraptors' names?
5. What messages does *Vulture's Wake* give the reader about the environment, the future, and the role of women in an organized and peaceful society?
6. What are your thoughts about the motivations of the Sons of Gaia? Are they any better or any worse than Mollie Green, the Colony men, or Roc? Explain your thoughts.
7. How do you think that such a fear of women came about? Do you think it will ever be overcome? Justify your reasoning.
8. What do you think the future holds for the crew of the Bouboulina? How will they survive?
9. What do you think will happen back in Vulture's Gate after the escape of Callum, Bo, and the girls? Will law and order ever be restored? Explain what you think will become of the Colony and of Flakie, Mollie Green, the Outstationers, the Sons of Gaia, and Mater Misericordiae.

Curriculum recommendation and discussion questions prepared by Judith Way. Judith Way is a teacher-librarian with a Graduate Diploma of Children's Literature and a Master of Arts. She was the recipient of the School Library Association of Victoria's John Ward Award for outstanding contribution to teacher librarianship and was awarded the Children's Book Council of Australia Eleanor E. Robertson prize.

A Note from the Author Kirsty Murray

“I wasn’t actually in search of an idea when *Vulture’s Wake* came to me. It’s a story that ambushed me while I was busy writing a work of historical fiction.

“It grew from disparate threads: a photo of a boy acrobat and an evening with my teenage goddaughter provided me with the inspiration for my two main characters.

“The book deals with the potential consequences of developments in science and culture. I’ve had a long-standing interest in popular science and had followed the coverage of the avian flu virus and advances in reproductive technologies. I’d read theories about the future of gender relationships, including what happens in societies with unusually high male populations.

“Historically, the skewing of the gender balance has influenced the creation of armies of mercenary soldiers and orders of monks, such as the Shaolin monasteries of China. Without human intervention, nature ordains that there should be more women than men; yet because of female infanticide and a preference for sons, there are currently 56 million more men than women in the world. These facts raise a lot of interesting questions about the future.

“The ideas led me to explore the type of dystopia that results when the genders are completely out of balance. In *Vulture’s Wake* I imagine a society where bird flu has damaged XX chromosomes so that the ability of humans to reproduce female children is compromised. It’s a society of men and boys, where the few remaining women are prized captives. For the boy character, Callum, the existence of another gender is only a rumor—he’s never met a girl or woman.

“I’ve come across plenty of fiction that explores the notion of a world without men or where men are peripheral. Inverting that premise offered lots of potential for an action-packed story.

“Contemporary teenagers have a vested interest in envisioning the world of tomorrow—one day they will be the people in charge. They will have to live with the consequences of older generations’ decisions and actions.

“One of the things I love most about writing for younger readers is that children are naturally philosophical and imaginative. In writing *Vulture’s Wake* I wanted to encourage readers to think creatively about the future.

“But while the book explores big issues, it’s not didactic. I want it to create arguments and challenge readers rather than provide blanket statements. It’s an adventure story, and it’s the action that draws readers into the future world and keeps them turning the pages.

“The book is also about the resilience of the young. In *Vulture’s Wake* it’s the characters of Bo and Callum that give the story its heart. Despite the darkness that surrounds them, their youthful energy, optimism, and strength keep them fighting for a brighter future.”

Just for Teachers

Vulture's Gate is a powerful and riveting novel set in a postapocalyptic world. Disease and anarchy ensue in a place where women and girls are thought to be extinct.

Across the Curriculum

Vulture's Wake can simply be read as an exciting adventure. Used in a classroom setting, *Vulture's Wake* is an excellent book to use across the curriculum and can lead to invaluable discussions regarding the environment, reproductive techniques, and the role of law and order in society. Interdisciplinary connections for the use of *Vulture's Wake* include:

- In **English** classes:
 - ~ as an example of speculative fiction;
 - ~ as a basis for a detailed piece of work on how the many and varied problems of the world could be overcome.
- In **Humanities** classes as an adjunct to the study of environmental issues, alternative energy sources, and crops.
- In **Health** classes to discuss the morality of introduced reproductive techniques and the role of women in an ordered society.
- In **Social Studies** classes as a launching pad or extension work when studying the historical results of anarchy and the role of law and order.
- In **Politics** classes to extend discussion of the role of government in society.

